Using Tech to Increase Parent Involvement

By Nancye Blair Black

This speaker discussed how to help students be more successful academically by involving parents. She talked about that involving parents has shown to be the number one way to help the students and graduation rates go up. She discussed how high school level parents don’t receive as much contact from students as they had at elementary level. She also noted that behavior improves in students with whom parents are involved and if parents know what's happening in the classroom, they are more likely to be touching base.

Studies showed that parent involvement programs DO work. The studies showed that three things predict parent involvement based on the program. The three things that predict parent involvement are: by design homework that increases parent/student interaction, holding workshops for families, and communicating with parents about child’s education (AT LEAST weekly).

She discussed then that in order for this to be facilitated that parents need the message they are WANTED and VALUED. The three factors that determine whether parents feel wanted and valued are parent’s belief about what is important, necessary, and permissible for what they can do with their children, parents believe they CAN have a positive influence, and parent’s perceptions that their children and school want them involved. I just had a conversation Friday night at the football game with a parent who stated they were so grateful for me involving them in their child’s school day and life, because they felt like that wasn’t valued as much as it used to be.

She continued on to discuss that when a parent feels connected on a regular basis, they will not feel the need to barge in on the classroom. I found it really interesting about the fact that she really iterated that you should know your type of parent in that household (single, two parent, grandparents...etc.). What their social economic status, race demographics are and find where the parents are and how to connect and how to get them involved.

Some ways that she discussed getting them involved were to email, but she stated that it has to be consistent! Parents need know how they will hear back and in what time. She also listed a website that you could have students set up, website-weebly.com, to feature student work. I really liked the idea she said about the class/school blog-students could blog and parents are given access-invite parents to be contributors to the blog-other parents cheering you on! On top of having the peers there cheering the high school student on you create an authentic audience, for students to share their work and/or brag about what they do (and who doesn’t like to brag about their child, but a parent!)

Next she talked about some ideas using web and technology tools to get parents involved. She talked about using google docs for a type of collaboration, to involve parent in classroom events, and assign parents a task and they edit and watch document of their student possibly. She talked about Voicethread, which allows student and teacher to input a series of photo/videos and add text, video, vocal comments. This would give them a place to showcase work for parents, students record a message and parents can comment. It really lets the parent see what they are accomplishing and not just knowing about it.

Another spot she talked about was Volunteerspot, in which parents can sign up for spots, it send reminder emails and sets up times to show what they have volunteered for and how they can help out in the classroom. She also discussed something I used last year, Remind 101 to communicate with parents via text messaging in addition to email, without having to share a personal number. She conclude that it is really important that you set the atmosphere that parents feel important, valuable, valued, and wanted. I think this is really a piece that is overlooked in schools today, because it’s easy to say that a parent doesn’t care, or doesn’t have the resources, if you never communicate with them about their child, whom they know best.